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Religion and Religious Change

Researching the history of religion in the early modern period is like catching fireflies. Our subject is manifestly everywhere, but it dances out of reach. When we see patterns, it is hard to make out what is real and what a trick of the light. And if we succeed in grasping it, what we find in our hands bears little relation to the living experience. Altogether it is a frustrating, tantalising and fascinating business.

The questions historians of religion would truly like to ask are inherently unanswerable. What did early modern people actually believe? In what ways did they believe? How and to what extent did their religion motivate them, govern their actions or dictate their patterns of thinking? What was the balance between sincerity and hypocrisy in their religion, and to what extent did they fuse into self-deception? What meaning did they find in religious practices and rites? Why did early modern people convert from one religion to another, or move between earnest commitment, nominal observance and (occasionally) frank unbelief? How was religion woven into the many fabrics of early modern society, economics, culture, politics and scholarship? We cannot truly answer such questions even for ourselves, still less so for others, and less still for others who are several centuries dead.

Of course, we can and do find plenty of clues and indirect answers to these questions, which in a rough empirical way often seem good enough. But while historians' instinct is to turn swiftly and gratefully from methodological nihilism to immerse ourselves in some real sources, we need always to be aware of the distortions which the vast silences in the evidence create. Like the proverbial drunk looking for dropped keys in a dark street, historians search not where the answers are, but where the light is best. We can almost never overhear early modern people's prayers or follow their religious journeys. When we can, even if we believe our sources, we can be sure we are dealing with very unusual people. Even then, the most potent religious experiences are often left unspoken, not least because they are inexpressible. We are reading gardeners' account books in order to recover the sensation of smelling a rose.[1]

This chapter will survey the sorts of clues which historians of early modern religion have used to piece together our provisional and indirect answers to these questions. Since religion professed to touch every area of early modern life, and sometimes did so, the range of sources that we can use is very eclectic. What follows begins from the well-lit terrain closest to the lamp-post and works outwards into the murkier and potentially more interesting realms beyond. Most examples are drawn from my own field of expertise, early modern Britain, but the source-types can be paralleled across Europe and beyond.

Statutes, formulae and confessions of faith

The official records of the various churches of the Reformation era are generally well-known and widely available, and obvious starting-points for research. The Lutheran Book of Concord, the decrees of the Council of Trent, the legislation of England's Reformation Parliament: documents such as these form legal frameworks which at least aimed to contain the religion of millions of people. It may seem obvious both that they should be consulted, and how they should be interpreted.

[1] Being Protestant, 10.

In fact, students and scholars are often surprisingly slow to consult them. Sometimes we assume that we already know more or less what they say, and that they have been so well-studied that there will be nothing more to find. These texts, however, were usually intensively drafted, with every word weighed, and they repay equally close attention from historians. Nor is their meaning as plain as it may appear. If we compare the final texts to any surviving drafts, or to previous statutes, catechisms or formulae on which they were modelled, startling differences can emerge.

Interpreting them is another matter again. Decrees, statutes or proclamations may assert authoritative norms, but did anyone obey them? Did their creators even expect obedience? This is in part a matter of context: some knowledge of a particular jurisdiction's legal culture is needed to understand the status a particular law might have. Laws are rhetorical as well as administrative devices, and we should not assume that they were meant to be enforced or even very long remembered. It is worth paying particular attention to promulgation: how were these decrees circulated, to whom and in what format? Even diligent circulation can change a law's meaning. The 1539 English anti-heresy law known as the Act of Six Articles proscribed six specific doctrines, but, partly thanks to the provision that it be read aloud in each parish church quarterly, it became a symbol of more general opposition to evangelical doctrines.[2]

Sometimes the texts themselves provide clues. Repeated condemnations of the same offence can look suspiciously ineffectual, although a law which is not fully enforced is not therefore a mere dead letter. Some decrees are plainly more practical than others. Certain schemes were too elaborate to be credible, such as the Scottish statute of 1552 which imposed an elaborate scale of fines for swearing profane oaths, culminating in (for a fourth offence) banishment or a year's imprisonment: the law reeks of Heath-Robinsonish impracticality.[3] Others lacked any teeth at all. The Council of Trent was not the first Council to declare that bishops ought to be resident in their dioceses; simply the first to deprive non-resident bishops of their incomes.

Confessions of faith and official catechisms pose slightly different challenges. Again, it is important to be clear exactly what their status is. Were all clergy, all holders of civic office, or even the population at large required to adhere to them? Was knowledge of them a prerequisite for admission to communion? Were there perceived ambiguities in them – of the kind which led, for example, to the Scots Confession of 1560 being supplemented by the so-called Negative Confession of 1581, drafted specifically to exclude Roman Catholics? Again, how their texts fit with the symbolic status they often had? The 1530 Augsburg Confession, for example, came to have a genuinely iconic status for Lutherans, as well as a pivotal legal role in the Holy Roman Empire after the 1555 Peace of Augsburg.

In general, we should be wary of assuming that these questions have plain answers, and suspicious of those who assert that a complex and muddy legal situation was in fact clear-cut. Even in Tudor England, perhaps early modern Europe's most centralised and bureaucratic state, recent research has demonstrated that the supposedly straightforward oaths imposed on the population in the 1530s dissolve into a tangle of chaos and inconsistency on close examination.[4] Early modern

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[2] 31° Hen. VIII c. 14 art. XVIII (*Statutes of the Realm* vol. 3 (London 1817), p. 743).
[3] The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland. vol. II: 1424-1567 (1814), p. 485.
[4] Gray, Oaths

bureaucracies lacked the means to enforce or even to communicate their wills consistently. A law, decree or catechism was simply an opening gambit in a process of negotiation, and sometimes the process went no further.

Liturgies, music and sermons

Many of the same caveats apply to these texts, for naturally, we should not simply assume that what was said in a book was what a minister or a congregation did. However, we can assume that liturgies were usually widely circulated, and suppose that they did guide practice fairly closely. Again, texts whose meanings we may think we know often repay close analysis. These were the words which most early modern people heard more often then any other: whether they loved or loathed liturgy, they swam in it. There are excellent modern editions of many liturgies, but the original texts, which survive in large numbers, are an underexploited resource, especially after the medieval period. As with all working books, liturgies often bear revealing marks of their use.

But a printed liturgy is a mere playbook, and rarely reveals much of how the play was staged – especially when daring clerical directors took liberties with it. Even less does it answer the more crucial question of how liturgy was experienced by lay people, who may not have been able to hear its words. For these questions, we must depend on the clues in the texts, in contemporary descriptions which tell us how they were used (usually grinding axes all the while), in the buildings (when they survive) and in the rare contemporary visual depictions of worship (idealised as they are). The growing scholarship on sacred space, and on religion and the body, emphasises the extent to which liturgy was a visual and lived experience. Alongside this is the longstanding, less fashionable but still essential field of the history of ecclesiastical archictecture.

The place of music in worship is an enormous field in its own right, and daunting to nonspecialists. Nevertheless it is sufficiently central to the experience of worship that it needs to be engaged with. Of necessity, we read texts which were in fact sung (congregationally or chorally), and must remember how that shaped their meaning. Music overlays texts with its own moods, a process about which early modern theorists had very advanced ideas. It also carries associations: if a new song is sung to an old tune, as was frequently the case in Reformed Protestant psalmody, the old words and meanings still cling to it. And as recent research has made clear, simply establishing which texts were sung to which tune is a question of daunting complexity.[5]

Sermons are amongst the richest and most plentiful sources for early modern religious history: they survive in vast numbers, in print and in manuscript, and do allow us to come close to eavesdropping on public worship. However, the relationship between the words of a printed sermon and the words which a preacher actually uttered in a pulpit is vexing. The extensive scholarship on early modern sermons[6] does give us some grounds for cautious optimism. Where it is possible to compare preachers' or hearers' notes with printed sermons, there is often a tolerable close relationship between the two. One obvious warning sign is excessive length: early modern congregations often expected hour-long sermons and might tolerate double

[5] Duguid, Psalms.
[6] Now dominated by Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*.

that, but preachers who felt that they were still warming up after two hours could give fuller vent to their views on the page. By contrast, an elaborate structure and the ostentatious use of ancient languages or theological jargon are perfectly credible features of the sermon as preached. Structures were deliberately used to assist hearers in note-taking or memorisation, and there is good evidence that congregations valued and took pride in learned preachers even (or especially) when they could not actually understand all that was said.

Published sermons are, however, more than a source for what the original preacher said. They were frequently published as models, and used by preachers with fewer aspirations to originality. Not many went so far as John Trusler, the eighteenth-century English entrepreneur who printed sermons using a typeface resembling handwriting so that preachers might pass them off as their own work. But these were not the only sermons published specifically to be preached by others: the most famous are the English church's official Homilies, one of the most under-used sources for English religious history.

Polemical and devotional works

The spread of printing in the early modern period; online databases such as the Universal Short Title Catalogue; scanned facsimile collections such as Early English Books Online, E-Rara, Gallica and those created by major libraries like the Bayerische StaatsBibliothek – all of these factors have ensured that early printed works are the richest, most diverse and most easily accessible set of primary sources for all aspects of early modern studies, especially for those lacking easy access to major archives.

They are also amongst the least complex sources to handle, at least in the sense that they were usually aimed at a fairly broad readership, and so modern historians are not entirely unlike their intended audience. Their apparent accessibility can be deceptive. It is worth being aware of the legal context within which they were created – some books were subject to formal censorship of various kinds; others were not but still tried to avoid provoking trouble; others still were openly illegal and therefore faced formidable problems in production and distribution. Especially when dealing with digital facsimiles, it is easy to forget that early printed books were not disembodied texts, but physical objects created by a complex and heavily-capitalised industrial process. To use them effectively it is important to have some understanding of that process, its limitations and peculiarities. A book's printer and publisher can be as important as its author.

We have a wealth of printed texts, but much less useful information about their readers. In the absence of sales figures, it is common to use frequency of reprinting as a proxy for a book's popularity, but since print runs varied dramatically in size, this can make an unexpected success (with a small initial printing) look much more impressive than a book with a guaranteed large market. As a measure, it also favours perennial steady-sellers over against topical works which might quickly go out of date. Nor is there a particularly good rate of survival for some printed works, especially cheap ephemera. There is, however, no other systematic means of assessing books' popularity. We are driven onto more haphazard measures such as occasional readers' comments on or responses to books, or imitation or plagiarism of them. If a book is banned – especially repeatedly – that tells us something. It is also worth

scouring surviving copies for readers' notes or underlinings, although these are notoriously difficult to date accurately. Only rarely do we have solid information about the provenance of a particular copy.

The genres of printed religious polemic and devotional writing are both blurred and hugely varied. Some, such as biblical commentaries and heavyweight doctrinal treatises, are evidently written primarily for scholars and ministers. Openly polemical works, which attracted considerable attention at the time and have continued to do so, are slipperier. A book such as Martin Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* may claim to be written for one set of readers, while in fact aiming at another. Polemical denunciations were more usually read by friends than enemies: they served to shore up support and to win over waverers, rather than to persuade the enemy. Some polemicists were aware of this; some seem not to have been.

Devotional works – books of prayers, guides to meditation, exhortations to moral living, and so forth – have had much less scholarly attention than polemics, partly because they are undeniably duller. With some exceptions, they remain a largely untapped resource, despite their perennial popularity with early modern readers. The most obvious exception is literary. The religious poetry of the early modern era has never wanted for scholarly attention, although it is often historians' duty to be more interested in bad than in good poetry: geniuses are by definition unusual. Even so, historians are sometimes too cautious about making use of these sources. Literary scholars read the same texts, but with different questions: their interest is chiefly in the texts themselves, whereas historians' concern is with the people who wrote and read them. And different questions can produce fresh answers.

In practice, of course, polemical and devotional works blur into one another. One genre which is particularly amphibious in this respect is improving history: martyrologies and other works of pious story-telling, which have long been quarried as sourcebooks in their own right. Although they invite scepticism, martyr-accounts of the Reformation era are often surprisingly accurate in their details. There were too many living witnesses who could (and did) publicly contradict and discredit martyrologists who massaged their facts or who simply got them wrong. The historians' bias, as ever, tended to be less in distortion than in selection. Martyrologists chose those facts which served the purposes (both devotional and polemical) for which they wrote, and then reproduced them fairly faithfully: leaving us, their historical successors, to listen for the elisions and the silences.

And printed works which have no explicitly religious content at all can provide the most valuable testimony. All manner of popular printed works can open unexpected windows into assumptions, practices and prejudices: crime pamphlets, ballads, guides to household management or to letter writing, even joke books (which can be excruciating to modern readers). It is, unfortunately, almost impossible to rule out the sudden appearance of material of religious interest in almost any kind of text. Religion was supposed to reach into every sphere of life, and sometimes it did. The consolation is the prospect of serendipitous discoveries almost anywhere.

Religious manuscripts

This category is even more miscellaneous than printed works, and blurs into it, since plenty of pious early modern people created handwritten books either in imitation of

printed works, or in the hope of achieving publication. These vary from beautifully executed fair copies to scarcely legible scraps. Their contents extend to everything that you might find in contemporary printed works, and often include substantial transcriptions from printed works, undertaken either as a pious exercise or simply as a way of preserving an important text in the pre-photocopier age. But they can also be far more individual and intimate. Personal letters are perhaps the best-known genre of such documents, and also amongst the easiest to use, since we normally know the author, the addressee and perhaps even the date. Other manuscript works are trickier. We should not assume that manuscript works were private: they might be widely circulated within a family or a circle of friends, especially when print publication was not readily available or when (as was often the case) it was seen as unappealingly plebeian. Some, however, were indeed private, either simply notes or drafts for the author's own use, or indeed material sufficiently intimate that the author might actively try to conceal them. Such works are sometimes written in codes or ciphers, some of which can now be broken, some not. We know that a large number of such works were destroyed by their authors or their heirs.

Some of these works can be gathered under the broad heading of 'self-writing' or 'ego-documents': awkward modern categories which include diaries and journals, autobiographies, collections of reflective prayers and many other similar texts. The early modern period is marked by the emergence of extended works of self-examination (many but not all religious in intent), a fact which has again drawn considerable attention from literary scholars. The number of manuscripts is small but their genre is immensely varied, drawing on models as diverse as Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*, classic martyrology, the medieval chronicle tradition and accountancy. The chief problem with these texts is their siren allure. The chance of an almost unmediated glimpse of an individual's religious life is immensely appealing, and some superb scholarship has been based on such sources. But they are few, wholly unrepresentative, often stylised and rhetorically complex. This is strong meat: it needs careful handling.

Blending into that heavily-examined set of materials is another, surprisingly under-exploited group: commonplace books, the miscellaneous notebooks and scrapbooks kept by many literate early modern people. Commonplace books offer the same opportunities and frustrations as rummaging through someone's desk drawers: disorganised jumbles of material, blending letters, prayers, recipes, sermon notes, medical notes, accounts, poetry, quotations on any subject, snippets of news, music, pornography, doodles, jokes and whatever else you might wish for. Libraries are full of them, and most of them are unloved. Their extremely miscellaneous nature makes them frustrating sources to use, for even when a remarkable scrap leaps out, what does it mean in that context? Even so, there is value in the reminded that early modern lives, like our own, blended the profound with the trivial. They remain a genre still to be quarried.

The visual arts

Historians are often nervous about venturing beyond written texts – and rightly so, because they can be formidably difficult to interpret. Yet as some bold pioneers have demonstrated, there are important insights to be had. There are established specialisms to turn to for assistance, but historians of art and architecture have their own distinct, disciplinary concerns, and even the traditional mutual suspicion between

historians and archaeologists reflects genuine disciplinary differences as well as mere prejudice.

As with music, a central problem – and value – of the visual arts as a historical source is their ambiguity: their meanings are inherently more ambiguous and malleable than those of written texts. Teaching ourselves to read complex images can feel like learning to break a code, but we should remember that they were not always even intended to have a single meaning, and that many contemporaries may have found them as opaque as we do. There is a grave risk of over-interpreting visual sources, or of mistaking a plausible conjecture for an established fact.

Visual images were of course themselves a primary site of contention in the Reformation disputes. The medieval truism was that images were 'books for laymen', a vital means of teaching the illiterate. Images from wall-paintings to printed woodcuts do offer us the tantalising possibility of contact with the illiterate majority, but we should not assume that this was their purpose: complex images, often depending on accompanying textual comment, could be at least as hard to read as a written text. As with printed sources, only more so, making any deductions about the reception of visual images is fraught with difficulty, except where there is direct evidence. Even acts of iconoclastic destruction can have many meanings.

As with literary scholarship, art history has tended to focus on the highest-quality works, but historians' interests are likely to be different. Courtly painting and architectural detail can be invaluable clues to the rarefied milieux which produced them, but were beyond the reach of most people. In recent years a number of scholars of early modern religion have turned instead to look at questions such as domestic space, interior decoration and household objects. This has taught us, for example, that Reformed Protestants' supposed iconophobia has been badly overstated.[7] Our attention, so long focused on churches, is moving to the site where most believers, especially women and children, lived most of their religion: the home.

Administrative records

Churches, however, do have some irresistible attractions, not least that their bureaucracies produce rich seams of records whose value for the religious history of the early modern period has long been obvious. In what follows it is possible only to sketch some of the most important categories of such records and what they can teach us.

Churchwardens' accounts or similar financial records survive for many parishes: intractable texts which conceal a wealth of invaluable information. They can be used to track changes in a church's decoration, musical provision and personnel; changes in its pattern of worship, as new books or goods are purchased; the wealth or poverty of a church and a parish; compliance with or resistance to the dictates of bishops, synods or magistrates. Local ecclesiastical power struggles will usually leave their mark in such documents. In combination, multiple sets of accounts can be used as proxies for national and regional change and variations. Occasional sets of accounts can provide much richer material, almost akin to a chronicle or diary. Some jurisdictions also required records to be kept of baptisms, marriages and funerals, which where they exist are invaluable data-sets. Beyond the obvious demographic and

[7] Hamling.

prosopographical uses, these records can be used to track, for example, some changes in religious affiliation (weighing the saints' names favoured by Catholics against the Old Testament names favoured by some Protestants) or conformity to ecclesiastical strictures on sexual activity (how many children are born nine months after Lent?).

Records of ecclesiastical discipline, whether at the level of the parish, deanery, presbytery or diocese, have long been recognised as a rich source for both official and unofficial religion. They can reveal the ambitions, capabilities and priorities of different ecclesiastical establishments: it is indispensable, for example, to know when tribunals stop prosecuting non-attendance at church, or begin pursuing sabbath-breakers with renewed energy. Where ecclesiastical tribunals are responsible for prosecuting heresy, that fact in itself m us something about power structures in a society, and the details of the proceedings tell us what inquisitors consider the nature of the heresy problem to be at that time and place. The consistorial discipline of Reformed Protestantism can be particularly revealing, whether it is seen as a tool of social control or as a more benign and paternalistic means of preserving order, and these minutes have been extensively mined by historians of France, Scotland, Geneva and elsewhere.

At least as importantly, these records testify to social realities as well as to official policy. Court documents deal with the behaviour of more or less ordinary men and women, and often purport to record their words verbatim. These transcripts need to be treated with some care: they are not audio recordings, but are at the least tidied up by scribes; they are often radically edited – not least because scribes would often only record a witness's answers to questions, not the questions themselves, which can be very distorting; and we cannot rule out the possibility that a witness has been materially misrepresented. And of course, even if the words are accurate, lies and half-truths are told in courtrooms every day.

With all those caveats, church courts can often provide the most vivid glimpses we have of the rougher fringes of everyday religious life. This is especially the case when lay people used those courts to sue one another for religious or religious-related offences: which could be anything from the moral offence of defamation (few things are more revealing than insults), through arguments over seating in church buildings, to disputes over tithes and wills.

The danger in interpreting this rich vein of material is a mirror image of the trouble with printed sources. It is rawer and perhaps more authentic, but no more representative. If printed texts present an overly tidy and pious image of early modern society, courts show us its raucous underside: most people avoided the law most of the time. The persistent problem of early modern religious life remains: accessing the now-silent majority of those who neither wrote religious treatises nor suffered prosecution for blasphemy, a mass of people whom we struggle to place between nominal conformity and earnest, unshowy piety.

One administrative source which has been extensively mined in an attempt to reveal these people's religion is wills. Most early modern people did not make wills, but a surprisingly large minority did, especially in some jurisdictions and in towns. Some wills include explicit or implicit statements of religious identity, usually associated with a 'bequest' of the testator's soul to God: stereotypically, Catholics would invoke the Virgin Mary and other saints, while Protestants might declare their hope to be justified through faith alone. Historians of the English Reformation, in particular, have attempted to use the shifts in these statements to track religious

change statistically, but the methodological problems with this are formidable. Quite aside from the demographic distortions (testators were richer, more male and, by definition, older than average), such statements were often formulaic phrases inserted by scribes or other legal advisors. More reliance can be placed on actual bequests, which we can assume represent testators' own views. It is harder to build statistical models from these, but where we find testators leaving endowments for Masses to be said for their souls, or for sermons to be preached in their memory; where we find gifts to a church in token of tithes forgotten, or towards a new pulpit lectern; where we find relatives being bequeathed named books, rosaries or paintings, or gifts to the poor in the expectation of their prayers – in these cases, we find early modern religion putting its money where its mouth was.

Above the parish level, the most consistently useful records are those of appointments to ecclesiastical office, and of visitation. Appointments may seem to be of mostly prosopographical interest, sometimes being little more than lists of names and places, but there are still riches to be had here. What are the patterns of change: are there times and places where the turnover of clergy is particularly rapid? What were the educational or regional backgrounds of new clergy? Who were their patrons? Why did their predecessors leave office, and for how long had the posts been vacant? How and how sustainably were their posts financed? How did all of these factors change over time, and how did they correlate with what other records have to tell us? These records may not often produce compelling personal narratives for us, but they can tell us an enormous amount about the practical condition of churches and their personnel.

Visitations are much more uneven, but their value is that church authorities were very often asking exactly the sorts of questions in which we are still interested: how was religious change being implemented or resisted on the local level? How conscientiously did the mass of the people observe their religion, and what was done to ensure that they did? In many cases, all that we have are the questions which diocesan or synodal authorities wanted to ask of local churches, but even these can be very revealing of the hopes, fears and priorities of administrations who were charged with turning abstract ideals into practical reality. Where we have answers, we should not assume them to be unvarnished truth, nor anyone's honest perception: local communities tend either to close ranks against nosey officials, or to use them to pursue local grievances. Visitors, of course, knew this, and we should credit them with being able to tease the truth out of their informants at least as well as we are able to do the same with the surviving records.

Everything else

These are the most obviously fruitful sources for researching early modern religion and religious change, but the subject's pervasive nature means that it can leave its fingerprints everywhere. The political and administrative records of early modern states are full of clues about religious life. Tax records tell us about the wealth or poverty of the clergy, the extent to which states were squeezing or discriminating between religious groups, the social shape of religious groups and the extent to which religious minorities were struggling or prospering. Military records can testify to the roles of churches in supporting, opposing or collaborating with war; the extent, if any, to which religious principles shaped military conduct, including deliberate targetting and destruction of the persons and property of opposing religious groups; and can

allow us to trace individuals both risking their lives for their religion, and betraying it. The many uses of political papers of all kinds hardly need to be mentioned, in an era when religion was a vital political interest and when political actors of all kinds either were or professed to be guided by genuine religious conviction. Guild and trade records can reveal unexpected secrets about religious observance (did the fishing industry genuinely prosper in territories where the Lenten fast was supposedly enforced?) or about the social status of the clergy (who might be employed as guild chaplains). The records of universities, of professional corporations of lawyers or medical practitioners, or of the printing industry may have particular relevance, since in the early modern era each of these were sites of high intellectual ferments and low rivalries which impinged on religious matters. Likewise the fragmentary and often intractable materials which show us how those worlds touched the lives of ordinary people. School textbooks, statutes and accounts can offer a rare glimpse into the workings of a world where many boys and even some girls learned much of their formal religion. The secular law-courts can at times be almost as rich a hunting-ground for religious practice and prejudice as their ecclesiastical counterparts. Public health and informal medical practice are generally very poorly documented, but the few materials that survive can be enlightening: from the urban bills of mortality which testify to the demography and pathology within which popular religion was formed, to the casebooks of unlicenced medics which can tell a tale of orthodoxy, heterodoxy and unbelief blended together and spiced with desperation.

The truly undiscovered country for historians of early modern religion remains archaeology. Institutional structures and disciplinary cultures are formidable barriers; more so, the fundamentally different questions which historians and archaeologists are trained to ask and which their material equips them to answer. There have been some serious attempts to engage archaeologically with the issues of concern to early modern historians of religion, though not yet consistently or sustainably.[8] Nevertheless, it is invaluable for even the most ideas- and texts-bound historians to engage with the gritty materiality of the past, which brings us forcibly up against the embodied reality of our forebears as both similar to and alien from us. Quite aside from the specific research insights it has to yield, it is also both spur and bridle to that most vital and most wayward of historical tools, the imagination: a vivid reminder that our sources are merely that, sources, the flotsam and footprints of people as real as ourselves.

[8] The most important work is still David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (ed), *The Archaeology of Reformation 1480-1580: Papers Given at the Archaeology of Reformation Conference, February 2001* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2003).